

History: "Hughes Telephone Company—Since 1911"

In January 1911, the Obadiah Telephone Company with 75 subscribers was purchased by Dolphus Edward and Ollie Denton Hughes, later known as "Ma" and "Pa" Hughes. This new adventure was a part of their desire to serve and improve the little community in which they lived.

The need for telephone service was emphasized by the outbreak of the disease, spinal meningitis within their community. This touched and claimed the lives of many of the "little ones" within their area, including their own three year old son, James Benjamin.

Strengthened by the need for telephones, sustained by their faith and pioneer spirit, "Ma" and "Pa" moved forward to expand service from one household to another.

During the early years, employees of the company, in addition to "Ma" and "Pa" Hughes, included neighbors within the community. Also assisting with the responsibility of the telephone company and farm chores were their children, Vona, Yerby, Lottie, Edna, and later Berta Lee.

In 1919, the company was expanded with the purchase of Dekalb Telephone Company in Kemper County. A company attorney was employed, John C. Stennis of Dekalb, (who later became a U.S. Senator and until this day remains a member of the U.S. Congress).

During the depression years the company and subscribers coped with the battle of survival. "Ma" and "Pa" Hughes recognized that their community more than ever before needed telephone service. Cash, 50 ¢ per month, for telephone service was substituted with farm items, such as eggs, potatoes, and milk.

Then came World War II, with its scarcity of materials and manpower. As in the past, prayer, patience and dedication brought them through the years of the depression and World War II into the brighter years of the fifties.

By 1950, telephone subscribers totaled 153 in Dekalb and 52 in Obadiah. In 1952, the family and community lost a loved one, "Pa" Hughes. Leadership role of the company was then assumed by "Ma" Hughes.

In the immediate years, the economy improved. Electricity, telephones and upgraded highways added to the quality of rural living. The number of telephone subscribers increased.

In 1956, the company was incorporated, thus becoming Hughes Telephone Company, Inc. By 1958, subscribers numbered 420 and were served by magneto telephones. In 1959, new dial offices were built in Dekalb and Obadiah providing service to 982 customers. In 1962, the family experienced another loss, that of the son, Yerby Lee Hughes, Sr.

Two new dial offices were built in 1965, one near the Okatibbee Reservoir to provide for the expanding area of Obadiah. The other dial office was to provide service for 470 additional customers in the Lynville area of Kemper County. Subscribers of Hughes Telephone Company, Inc. now totaled 1733.

A sad, but necessary change in leadership was made in 1976. "Ma" Hughes passed away leaving the children and sixteen grandchildren responsible for carrying forward the community service she and her companion began so long ago.

In 1979, the Dekalb office was changed from a dial office to a digital computer operated, solid state exchange, giving the options of all the most modern features, such as call forwarding, call waiting, speed calling, three way calling and the provisions of all one party service.

Due to the expansion of the Obadiah area, in 1980 the fifth office was built. A new digital office known as the Duffee Exchange provided its subscribers with all the new features of the Dekalb Exchange.

By the year end of 1981, the number of telephone stations in the five exchanges were: Briarwood 1293, Dekalb 1784, Duffee 948, Lynville 757, Obadiah 1351. Thus the number of telephone stations were 6134 and main stations of 4210, providing 95% of the customers with one party service. The company operated in part of five counties: Kemper, Lauderdale, Neshoba, Newton and Noxubee with 830 square miles of territory.

In 1986, as we observe the 75th Anniversary of our company, plans are underway to provide our subscribers in each of the five exchanges with the most up-to-date office equipment in today's market. This equipment will have the capacity for providing all the many special features of today and those of the future made possible by advanced technology.

An intangible part of the company has been its employees of the past and those of the present. The concern of the employees has been that of installing and maintaining the service of the subscriber, as provided by the company.

Customers, employees and progress of the company are of the utmost importance to the company owners and family members. The goal of the family and employees is the same as that established by "Ma" and "Pa" Hughes in 1911; to provide the best service possible to our customers and to keep Hughes Telephone Company a vital part of the community.

We are grateful to our customers, employees and friends who through the many years have shared in the struggle of growth of our company. Our sincere thanks to each of you.



Staff photo by Rogelio Solis

Berta Lee White remains at helm of Hughes Telephone, which her parents founded

never wanted to move into our area," she said. "That's the thing most people find hard to understand."

"We've always had a good relationship with South Central Bell. If one company needed help or an opinion from the other, we were always there for them. It was never one against the other, but rather all working together."

The company hopes to eventually provide enhanced emergency information service to local authorities, but will not do so until county roads are properly designated and numbered.

"Three of our five exchanges are providing full services. We hope to have the other two updated by the first of January so we can provide more complete

customer services."

To guarantee that the spirits of commitment and service of "Ma" and "Pa" Hughes remain alive, the company's 24 employees have pledged in their written history to "provide the best service possible to our customers to keep Hughes Telephone Company a vital part of the community."

Dolphus Edward & Ollie Denton Hughes
1900



Family 1911

Children: Left; Yerby L, Center; Vona, Front Left; Lottie, Front Center; Edna

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Inserts: Left, Bennie—Right, Berta Lee



Hughes Telephone Company Family

CHILDREN

Carrie Lavonia Webb	Lottie Lorie Lackey
James Benjamin Hughes*	Edna Estelle Smith
Yerby Lee Hughes*??	Berta Lee White

*Deceased

GRANDCHILDREN

George Edward Lackey
Willie James Lackey
Will Smith Lackey, Jr.
Harry Noel Lackey

Yerby Lee Hughes, Jr.
Betty Jane Lavergne
Barbara Anne Landry
James Franklin Hughes

Edrie Earline Seymour
Jack Hayless Smith
William Gary Smith
Dorothy Lorie McElroy

Sarah Ollie McDonald
Lavonia Jeannine Shearin
Berta Joan Evans
Gordon Hughes White

Great-Grandchildren: 49

Great-Great-Grandchildren: 40

Company Attorney: James D. Spinks

Tuesday, August 5, 1986

The Me

Hughes Telephone is set to celebrate 75th birthday

By Rogelio Solis

The Meridian Star

What began as a community life line, has endured 75 years of wars, financial strife and great technological changes.

The Hughes Telephone Co. of Bailey celebrates its 75th anniversary Saturday, Aug. 9.

"We will mark the occasion with a short ceremony," said Berta Lee White, president and youngest daughter of founders Dolphus "Paw" Edward and Ollie "Ma" Hughes.

"Then we will have an old fashioned social with ice cream, lemonade and cookies, just like 'Ma' used to have," she said.

The company began in January 1911 when the Obadiah Telephone Co. was purchased by her parents, according to Mr. White. The company had 75 subscribers at the time.

An outbreak of spinal meningitis claimed the Hughes' three-year-old son, James Benjamin. His death brought attention to the need for improved telephone service in the community as other families with sick children needed a method of communication between themselves and the local physician.

"My parents were farmers and shopkeepers and owned a little

grist mill," Mrs. White said. "So our store became the natural place to put the switch board, since it was the center of business.

"During the early years, family members and neighbors served as employees," she said.

In 1919, the company expanded with the purchase of DeKalb Telephone Co. in Kemper County.

During the depression years, Mrs. White recalled that telephone subscribers often paid bills by giving the Hughes farm items that could be sold at their store in lieu of payment.

In 1950, telephone subscribers totaled 153 in DeKalb and 52 in Obadiah. In 1956, the company incorporated as Hughes Telephone Co. Inc.

In 1958, subscribers numbered 420 and in 1959, new dial offices were built in DeKalb and Obadiah to provide service to 982 customers.

By 1965, two new dial offices were built and 470 additional subscribers were added from the Lynville area of Kemper County.

Total subscribers now numbered 1,733.

In 1976, "Ma" Hughes died. Her husband had died in 1952.

By 1979, the DeKalb office changed from a dial office to a digital computer-operated, solid state exchange. This change allowed the telephone company

to provide such features as speed dialing, call forwarding, call waiting and conference calls.

In 1980, a fifth office was built due to expansion in the Obadiah area. The new digital office, the Duffee exchange, provides subscribers in that area with the features of the DeKalb exchange.

By 1981, there were five exchanges: Briarwood, DeKalb, Duffee, Lynville and Obadiah. The company provided service in parts of five counties — Kemper, Lauderdale, Neshoba, Newton and Noxubee — with 830 square miles of territory.

"We provide one party service to over 95 percent of our 5,500-6,000 customers," Mrs. White said.

"Our parents never thought about how far reaching the service would become. This all wasn't to make money but to mainly provide a service. That was the basic purpose of it. Of course as the community built up and more people wanted service, it expanded."

The celebration also marks another type of history. "As far as we can tell, we are the oldest family-owned telephone company in the country," Mrs. White said.

During an era of corporate takeovers, Hughes Telephone Co. has managed to remain family owned.

"South Central Bell ... ha